

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated March 17, 2004 (Paper No. 11). Claims 37 to 78 are in the application. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Turning first to formal matters involving the drawings, Applicants note that they do not have a record of USPTO approval for drawing changes requested in a Request For Approval To Amend Drawings dated July 5, 2000. This Request was filed in conformity with then-existing rules on amendments to drawings, which have since been superceded. Accordingly, and since the drawing changes attended to typographic and other formal matters, Applicants presume that they are approved and submit herewith replacement drawing sheets.

Turning to the merits, all claims were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) over U.S. Patent No. 6,400,466 (Yamazaki), or under § 103(a) over Yamazaki in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,452,094 (Ebner). The rejections are respectfully traversed, for the reason that Yamazaki is not prior art to the subject application.

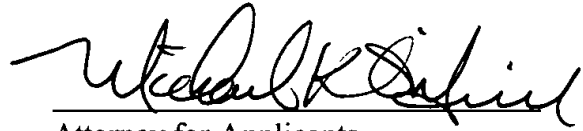
Specifically, Yamazaki's earliest date is September 30, 1998, which corresponds to its U.S. filing date. In contrast, the present application is entitled to the filing date of its parent, namely July 29, 1997, which is earlier than the 1998 effective date of Yamazaki.

Accordingly, since Yamazaki is not prior art to the subject application, withdrawal of the § 102(e) and § 103(a) rejections is warranted.

No other matters being raised in the Office Action, it is believed that the entire application is fully in condition for allowance, and such action is courteously solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, CA office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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